

Good Evening,

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Committee, I am Jeremy Figueroa-Ortiz, a first year Dental Student at UConn Health. I have been a student here since August; however, I have worked at UConn Health for 6 years as a contractor and have been a part of the Health Career Opportunity Programs through the Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine for nearly 8 years now. I am a resident of New Britain, CT.

In my time here, I have seen UConn Health blossom into the focal point of Connecticut and a domain of innovation. With that, I must say thank you for all of your incredible support for the University of Connecticut Health Center. Through state investments in UConn Health, from Bioscience CT to your regular investments in our Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine, you have made it a great university that is making a real difference to our State and to UConn students – over 80% of whom are from Connecticut. We are extraordinarily eager to use the skills we have acquired in our professional training in the communities that we call home.

The recommended budget released last week creates a large gap between state funding and what is needed to operate UConn Health next year. These cuts would impinge the progress made at UConn Health and I fear they will negatively affect my role as a student and, down the road, as a provider.

I chose to come to UConn Health over other competitive offers because of UConn's commitment to progress and its commitment to uplifting its students through unique opportunities. From its dedication to research and science to its presence in all communities. UConn has exemplified how I want to conduct myself as a provider.

Since enrolling here, I have become a mentor through the Health Career Opportunity Programs where I spend time every Saturday educating inner city youth about opportunities in health care and possibilities in education. I am also an active member in the Urban Service Track, where we tend to various community needs from youth education in some of Connecticut's most underachieving elementary schools to providing much desired screenings to populations who face significant barriers in health care. I have been exposed to and have become passionate about some of Connecticut's biggest problems such as homelessness, the increased drug use, and teen pregnancy, amongst many more.

The state is in need, now more than ever, of UConn Health's ability to provide community initiatives, to produce outstanding physicians and dentists, and to continue to be the innovative entity it has proven to be in recent years. None of this can be done without your help and funding.

I am very concerned that these cuts will be very harmful to my education, research opportunities, and my ability to have the resources necessary to help generate change. Again,

this funding is critical to making sure that UConn Health can continue to play the important role that it does in contributing to a strong Connecticut in the future.

I understand that the challenges you face in trying to balance the State budget are daunting. No question it is a very difficult time. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and urge you to minimize the cuts to UConn Health.